



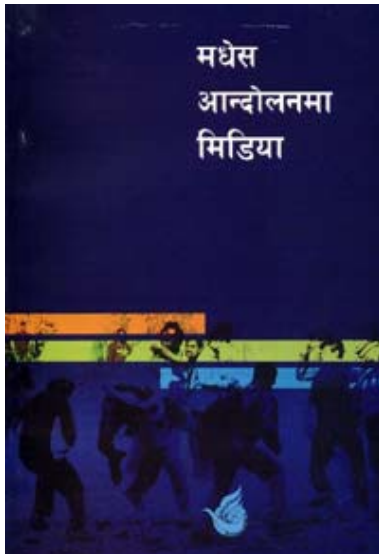
**USAID | NEPAL**  
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

## SUCCESS STORY

### Identifying Issues of the Madhesh and the Role of Media



A woman discusses issues of concern to the Madhesi people at a workshop.



The report "Media in the Madhesh Movement" was released in August.

In August 2006, the U.S. Agency for International Development's Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) began a 2-year, \$15,000,000 program in Nepal to bolster the current peace process, strengthen governance mechanisms, and support positive, nonviolent community engagement in the country's political, social, and economic future. The objectives of the program are to:

1. Increase access to information and diversify public debate on issues critical to political transition, and
2. Increase the effectiveness of key political transition institutions.

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**September 2007** – Although they constitute about one-third of the population, according to the 2001 census, Nepal's Madhesi have historically been marginalized from the country's political, economic, and social life. Frustration within the Madhesi community boiled over on January 19, 2007, with the beginning of the "Madhesh Movement," three weeks of unrest that resulted in the loss of 27 lives and extensive damage to property. Since then, the Terai region, where the Madhesi population is concentrated, has seen a proliferation of armed groups claiming to fight for these marginalized people and an increasingly deteriorated peace and security situation, which threatens to derail the peace process.

With USAID/OTI assistance, a local nongovernmental organization (NGO) facilitated -- in seven critical Terai districts -- day-long district-level dialogues aimed at building consensus on the key Madhesi issues and demands. The 357 dialogue participants, including Madhesi activists, local leaders, civil society members, and representatives from the media, focused first on identifying and then on categorizing the critical issues into four broad categories: social, political, economic, and cultural. Dialogue outcomes were compiled in a report entitled "Issues of Madhesh," which was publicized at a press conference on July 6, 2007, in the presence of representatives from the government, the U.N. Mission in Nepal, the Office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights, agitating groups, and other stakeholders. E-mail correspondence praised the report as a "timely and much-needed document."

In addition, during the recent unrest accusations surfaced that media reports were biased, which fostered anger among demonstrators and threats against journalists. To study the role of the media, USAID/OTI provided support to a respected NGO working in the media sector for an analysis of media activities during three pivotal incidents. The NGO's report, "Media in the Madhesh Movement," was publicized on August 13, 2007, at a press conference attended by many media outlets. The report criticized the media for unprofessional reporting and the demonstrators for violating freedom-of-press rights. The findings were well received and widely discussed in reflective articles in the press.

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